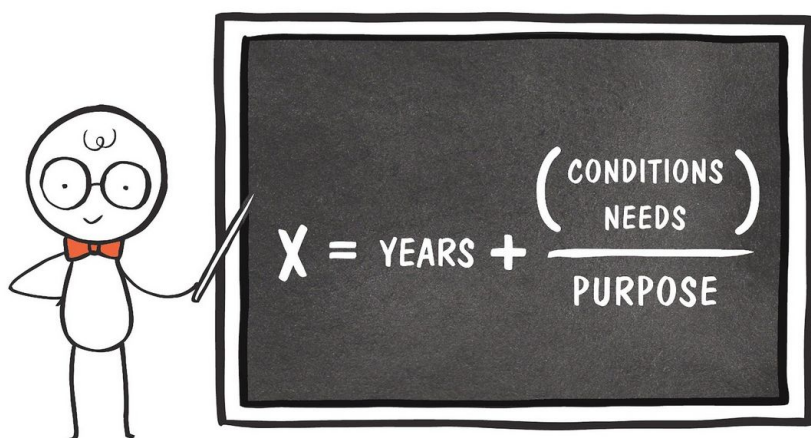


How to **Think** Like a Futurist
“Solving for X”



Solving for X

There are as many paths to move from now to what's next as are imaginable, but that doesn't make any of them right for you. The task is to find the path that simultaneously solves for future conditions, customer needs, and organizational purpose—and delivers the highest value for all. Solving for X gets you there.



CUT YOUR IDEAS DOWN TO THE SIZE OF TOMORROW

In business, we're always looking toward the future. We may have a big goal, an ambitious vision, an innovation opportunity, or a simple hunch that's pulling our attention. However it shows up, our future state is calling, compelling us to get busy building What's Next. But how?

When staring at a fuzzy future, the Solving for X formula makes sure you're defining the problem well, pursuing Best Questions, and leveraging your unique advantage. Solving for X transforms your compelling-yet-hazy idea into a ready-to-implement blueprint for strategy and innovation.

Solving for X is how we start to think like a futurist. It's a hedge against the inefficiency of chasing trends and competitors that is, sadly, so common. Instead, it finds the path to an effective and relevant future that is precisely right for you.



Solving for X

BUILD YOUR PATH TO WHAT'S NEXT

STEP 1: FOCUS YOUR IDEA

Understanding your X is the first step. This starts to get at why you're 'Solving for X.' In pursuing [insert your grand ambition], it's important to determine the ultimate benefit to you, your customer, and stakeholders you believe this work can offer. By defining your X first, you'll also define what a good solution looks like.

Describe success in terms of value to stakeholders, including: Your customers/clients/users (focus on needs met), your organization, your community, and social impact, R&D, industry leadership

- What are the barriers and opportunities you may run into?
- Even if results are disappointing, why would this project be worth pursuing?

STEP 2: ESTABLISH YOUR TIME HORIZON

Ambitions don't neatly fall into planning calendars. In fact, they often need time to unfold. Whether your horizon is 10, 5, or 2 years, for instance, will go a long way to helping you scope research for the other factors in the 'Solving for X' equation. When estimating your horizon, we ask:

- What are your instincts about how long to 'prime relevance' and 'prime advantage' for this work?
- Is there a 'maturity horizon' for some of the trends you're following?
- Are there organizational or market cycles you're trying to get ahead of, or that may impact your outcomes?
- When is the most likely time for a pilot to be launched?



Solving for X

BUILD YOUR PATH TO WHAT'S NEXT

STEP 3: USE PURPOSE TO FILTER YOUR BEST IDEAS

Purpose is the promise you can make to your customers now, that will still be relevant in the future. While you may have many competitors, the core beliefs, values, methods, and models with which you do it is unique. And this purpose is the most important and specific filter for your ideas: it's the ground you stand on while everything else is shifting. As conditions change, it's critical to hold tight to purpose, but play loose with tactics. To investigate purpose, we ask:

- Adapted to changing conditions, how does your organizational purpose stay true?
- What new opportunities do you see to meet your audience's needs with more ease, deeper connection, and greater relevance?
- What will you have to build (organizational capacity, partnerships, awareness) to meet this future opportunity?

STEP 4: IDENTIFY THE NEEDS YOU HOPE TO MEET

Solving for people's needs will ensure you're relevant and adding value to the people, the market, the industry, and the community. To determine human needs, we ask:

- What impact do you hope to have in your audience's/customer's lives?
- What do you hope they will feel, believe, see, do as a result of your 'solution'?
- What are your assumptions about how these needs shift as life stage, culture, and context shift in the future?



Solving for X

BUILD YOUR PATH TO WHAT'S NEXT

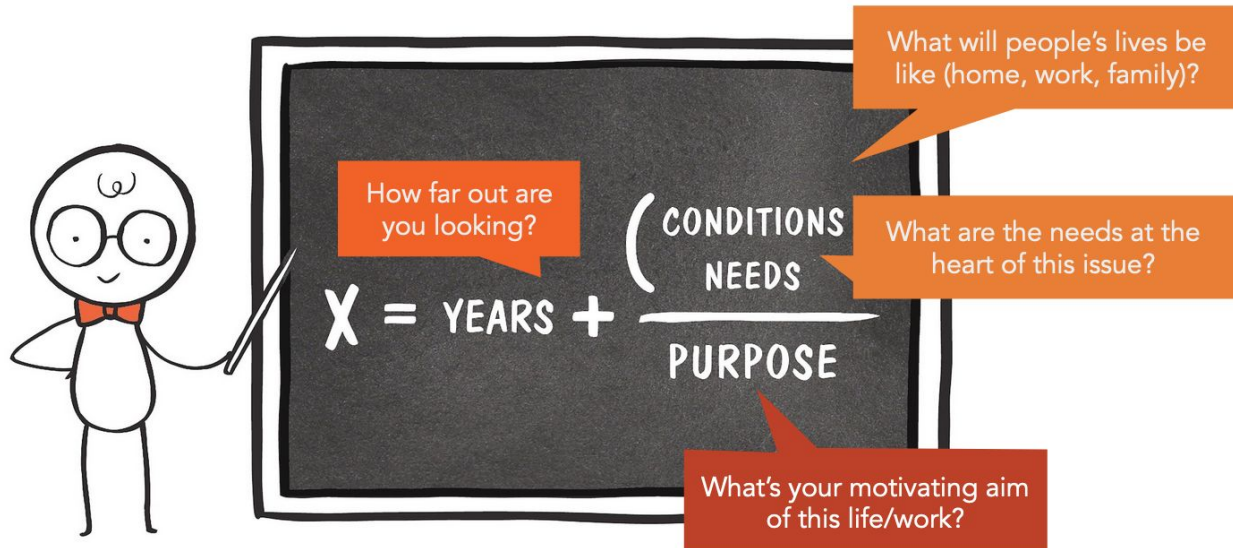
STEP 5: INVESTIGATE THE CHANGING CONDITIONS

To anticipate how people's context will change, we need to learn where and how their home, family, work, and schooling will play out, as well as what they'll likely care about and the pressures they'll be facing. To investigate this future, we use the Four Forces to scan what's changing. To see how the force fields will impact the issues pertinent to your purpose and needs, we ask:

- How might the effects of climate change influence lifestyles in the next years (energy, water, food production, domestic and international migration, catastrophic events)
- Which technologies will likely have the most significant impact on the way people live, work, play, communicate, socialize, and buy goods and services?
- How will shifting demographics (age, culture, worldview) affect region, industry, workplaces, and communities?
- How will political, economic, and regulatory changes influence how you operate? Implications in your customer's lives?



Solving for X



WHEN YOU CAN BENEFIT FROM 'SOLVING FOR X'

If you want to investigate a 'white space' of opportunity or challenge. By defining and refining the various conditions, you create a clearer sense of what is possible, sensible, and doable.

When you're feeling stuck. Often when we're stuck, it simply means that we've come to the limit of our understanding, and we have to learn more. 'Solving for X' will show us a path of learning to make sense of your future's requirements and opportunities.

When what you're doing feels fuzzy. That fuzziness indicates there is something else to make sense of before you turn to action.

Ready to *find your X* in what's next?

[Connect with Cecily](#) to uncover how you can use this innovative framework to craft a personalized strategy for your unique future. Then you can plan innovation pipeline that brings your vision to life.

Explore the Six Fluencies of 21st Century Leadership at [Lead Like a Futurist](#)

